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General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

99th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 4 June 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 4

Election of the President of the General Assembly

Election of the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session

The President: In accordance with rule 30 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, of 19 December 1978, the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session should be elected from among the Latin American and Caribbean States.

In that connection, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States for the month of March 2008 that the Group has endorsed His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua for the presidency of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex V to the rules of procedure, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua elected by acclamation President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session.

May I offer His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann my congratulations upon his election to the presidency of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session.

This high-profile position offers both the Republic of Nicaragua — a founding Member of the United Nations — and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States an important opportunity to strengthen the role of the General Assembly and to promote the three pillars of the United Nations, namely, development, peace and security, and human rights.

Having been Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua for more than 10 years, His Excellency can draw upon a vast political and diplomatic experience, acquired at both the national and international levels, during the next session. Throughout his life, Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann has worked with great dedication to help people living in poverty to overcome social injustice and has assisted in the aftermath of several natural catastrophes. For that work he has received numerous national and international awards. I am sure that his first-hand experience and insights will be of great help when he leads the Assembly's work in addressing the great challenges of our day and particularly in driving forward the United Nations development agenda.

Furthermore, as a scholar of communications, His Excellency will, I am sure, be able to build bridges of trust where they are needed and to reach out in the language of compromise to achieve results with respect

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to the many important issues that the Assembly will consider.

I am confident that, given such experience and skills, His Excellency will be able to successfully discharge his duties and responsibilities to the Assembly and to continue efforts to foster a climate of mutual trust and flexibility among Member States.

We are facing a genuine challenge in our efforts to make the United Nations more relevant and to strengthen its authority. The priority issues of our times demand a United Nations that is able to rise to the challenges posed by the food crisis, climate change, global terrorism and flagrant abuses of human rights. That is why the broader United Nations reform agenda — which includes prioritizing our mandates, strengthening management and improving coherence and accountability — remains so critical to the credibility of the Organization.

Experience demonstrates that when Member States engage substantively on priority issues, the Assembly becomes stronger and more effective, and we are better able to live up to the high expectations that the global public has of the true parliament of nations.

Continuity in the work of the General Assembly is also an essential part of the process of boosting the relevance, credibility and standing of our resolutions, decisions and deliberations. I therefore encourage Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann to draw upon the experience and support of the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and of the various Co-Chairs and facilitators.

There are a number of ongoing initiatives and consultations that will require his close attention upon taking office. At the beginning of the sixty-third session, two very important high-level events will take place: on Africa's development needs and the Millennium Development Goals and on the ongoing preparations leading to the Review Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Doha at the end of the year.

I am confident that during the transition period Member States will work supportively and constructively while His Excellency conducts consultations to set up the forthcoming programme of work and the priorities for the next session. My Office and I personally also stand ready to ensure a smooth transition and a successful beginning to the sixty-third session.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

From experience, I know that enjoying the support of all members of the General Assembly is truly a privilege; but it also involves great responsibility to balance opposing interests and to forge consensus. Above all, it involves the responsibility to help Member States to be the driving force behind the Assembly's work. I would like to wish you, Sir, success and luck as you continue the work of the General Assembly during the sixty-third session.

It is a great pleasure for me to invite His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann to take the floor.

Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am very moved to feel the affection and confidence that members have shown towards me in electing me President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session. I thank all Member States, in particular my Nicaragua and my greater homeland, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, for their generous endorsement by acclamation. We must maintain that unity in order to help put our Organization on track to meet resolutely the demands of the third millennium.

The United Nations still has a lot to contribute to the world. However, in order to do so effectively, it must be precisely what its name implies: an organization of united nations, not an organization of nations in disarray, much less one of subjugated nations. Unity based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members is currently the greatest demand placed on the Organization — unity in the struggle to democratize the United Nations and unity in the effort to preserve the world and all manifestations of life within it, for the sake of present and future generations, from the scourge of war between Member States and acts of aggression such as those occurring in Iraq and Afghanistan. There must be unity in the struggle to eradicate hunger and poverty, and unity in the struggle to preserve the world's indispensable biodiversity and cultural diversity.

What we need, dear sisters and brothers, is an infallible unity in order to build solidarity. We should not forget those paradigmatic phrases of the Constitution of UNESCO:

> "[A] peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and [...] the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind."

Without that peace, which springs from solidarity, the world cannot be saved and it will continue to sink into the morass of selfishness, individualism and indifference towards the fate of the other half of the men, women and children on Earth who live, or rather survive, submerged in hunger and poverty. Hunger and poverty are inexcusable while others spend lavishly on luxury items and superfluous things and devote trillions to wars. We need great unity to free ourselves, together, from so much folly.

The unity that the world requires of us is born of love and a desire to transform each of us into instruments of peace, justice and solidarity. I firmly believe that that is essential to ensuring that we achieve our common goals while respecting our most important and diverse national interests. We cannot therefore allow hatred, rancour or a desire for revenge in our struggle. On the contrary, that is what we must firmly fight with unbending love and respect. Ghandi must be our paradigm in the struggle for a better world.

The United Nations continues to be the most important Organization in the struggle for the survival of the human species and of any manifestation of life here on Earth. All of us here in the United Nations, however, are and should continue to be committed, individually and collectively, to respecting the principles and rules of behaviour established in the Charter. It makes no sense to sign the Charter and then proceed to act as if it entailed no obligations — as if others are obliged to abide by it, but we are not. In addition to being a grave mistake, that would work against the noble principles of the United Nations and the hopes of humanity.

The selfishness out of which we often act is responsible for the most pressing problems in the world today. The anthropogenic nature of some natural phenomena, including climate change, can no longer be refuted. It is also irrefutable that the behaviour of some Member States has caused the United Nations to lose much of its credibility as an Organization capable of putting an end to war and of eradicating extreme poverty from our planet.

We should stop the denials. We should begin to act seriously and, with all due responsibility, call things by their proper names and handle our problems with total and complete candour.

However, the candour and steadfastness that we are calling for, and which we will need if we are to prevail in our struggle, should not be confused with an invitation to lash out against any particular country, as if in vengeance. That would be to deny that all of us, without exception, are to a lesser or greater degree responsible for the regrettable state of our world.

It is incumbent upon all of us to unite and steer our Organization and our world towards the path of peace and solidarity. The United Nations has officially designated 2009 as the International Year of Reconciliation. Let us fully heed that call. Reconciliation does not oblige us to forget the past; that would be impossible. What reconciliation obliges us to do is prevent memories of past outrages from becoming obstacles to our unity from now on. We must therefore be careful not to wear each other down through futile recriminations.

I firmly believe in the revitalizing power of love, and that the different and better world that each and every one of us yearns for is possible. That is why I am here and why I have agreed to assume the great responsibility that the General Assembly has just bestowed upon me.

I wish to express my deep gratitude for President Kerim's cordiality towards me and for the frank and honest way he has shared his experience with me. His cooperation during the transition period will be extremely important for me, my staff and our management of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I applaud the manner in which President Kerim responded to the general acclaim in this Organization for the revitalization of the General Assembly in order to facilitate the construction and development of a more dynamic and efficient multilateralism while restoring the desired equilibrium between the principal organs of our system.

Rest assured, Sir, that during the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, we will follow your dynamic example by giving all of our support to the Working Group on the revitalization of this Assembly,

and we will endeavour to strengthen its role, its efficacy and its efficiency, reaffirming the leadership role assigned to it by the Charter.

I also wish to acknowledge our dear Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, with whom I will undoubtedly work in a spirit of excellent cooperation and coordination. I applaud our Secretary-General's vigorous and swift response to the most pressing issues of the day. I would like specifically to mention his leadership in facing the worldwide crisis unleashed by skyrocketing food prices, with its traumatic consequences for billions of people around the world.

I wish to congratulate in advance those who are about to be elected Vice-Presidents. I extend my warmest congratulations to all of them. I assure them that their jobs will not be merely ornamental or limited to protocol. We have a lot of work ahead of us, and I plan to share my responsibilities with the Vice-Presidents. I will endeavour to ensure that we make an exemplary team, which will encourage greater unity within our Organization.

In addition to paying priority attention to the fight to eliminate hunger and poverty from the world and to democratize the United Nations, we will pay very special attention to such issues as climate change, the energy crisis, terrorism, human rights, disarmament and nuclear control, the rights of women and children and the preservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity. Of course, all of the other very important issues on the Organization's agenda will also receive all the attention they deserve.

Once again, I extend my very warm thanks to all. Members may rest assured that we will spare no efforts to ensure that the sixty-third session of the General Assembly will be prepared to meet the demands of this very difficult, but also hopeful, moment.

The winds of unity are blowing stronger than ever south of the Rio Grande. Just 12 days ago, on 23 May, a treaty was signed in Brasilia to establish the Union of South American Nations. That is indeed cause for celebration. It brings us great joy and inspires us to keep fighting with even more zeal for the unity needed not only in Latin America and the Caribbean, but throughout the world and our Organization. The more united our nations are, the more successful the United Nations will be in definitively eradicating war, hunger and poverty on Earth.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Her Excellency Mrs. Asha-Rose Migiro.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Allow me to warmly congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann brings to the job decades of experience, not only on the international scene, but in the humanitarian arena as well. His long and varied career will serve him well here at the United Nations, where momentum is already building towards the next session of the Assembly.

Indeed, preparations are under way for the Secretary-General and the President of the Assembly to jointly convene a high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals. The aim is to push for accelerated progress in reaching those critical targets to improve living conditions for the world's poorest people. That is just one of many major milestones planned for the next session, but, as always, there will also be a great deal of steady, painstaking work to address the broad ranging issues on the United Nations agenda and to help the Organization keep pace with emerging developments and demands.

The world is increasingly turning to the United Nations to solve global problems, and the work of the General Assembly is critical to meeting those high expectations. By joining forces under the leadership of the President, we can forge effective responses that will make a difference in the lives of millions of people across the world.

I want to assure Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann, on behalf of the Secretary-General, of our full support as he prepares to take office and during his tenure as President. We look forward to working closely with him to rise to the many challenges we face by strengthening the United Nations so that it can better serve the peoples in whose name our Charter was adopted.

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her statement.

I now call on the representative of Egypt, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): It is my great pleasure to speak today on behalf of the African Group to congratulate the President-elect of the General

Assembly at its sixty-third session, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua, representing the Latin American and Caribbean States. His election by acclamation today is a clear reflection of our full trust in his ability to lead our work and a sign of confidence in his vast experience and exceptional qualifications, which will promote and push forward our extensive work in the General Assembly.

The sixty-third session will convene in September 2008 at a time when the international community is facing many new challenges: climate change, food security, energy and increased fluctuations in financial markets, along with the pressing challenges of enhancing development activities in Africa and achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, which will be among the subjects of the first high-level debates and actions of the sixty-third session and are largely connected to the development challenges facing many of the developing countries. We hope those issues will be addressed through many conferences to come, including the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and others.

The African Group has full confidence that President-elect d'Escoto Brockmann has the necessary multidimensional experience and qualifications that would allow him to successfully lead our efforts towards, inter alia, fighting poverty, disease, organized crime, trafficking in persons and narcotic drugs, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and small arms and light weapons, and will play a significant role in preventing and resolving conflicts, peacebuilding, ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly for women and children, and promoting dialogue among civilizations, as well as in the reform of the United Nations and the revitalization of the Assembly.

The African Group fully trusts that President-elect d'Escoto Brockmann will continue to build on the progress and successes achieved through the dynamism of President Srgjan Kerim in enhancing the ability of the Assembly to effectively and urgently respond to the needs of all peoples around the world and to guide the General Assembly to assume its central responsibilities as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, as well as its role in the process of standard-setting, the codification of international law and ensuring its full respect. The African Group will extend its full support to the President-elect in fulfilling all its aspirations and the aspirations of all States Members of the Organization.

The President: I call now on the representative of Kazakhstan, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mrs. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): On behalf of the Group of Asian States, I have the honour to express warm wishes and congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua on his election as President of the General Assembly for its sixty-third session. Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann's impressive experience and wide-ranging professional achievements in the pursuits of international diplomacy and politics will without doubt be of great value in guiding Member States through the important and complex issues before them, and in maintaining our momentum so that we can attain the main objective of this body, namely long-term peace, security and prosperity. I wish to assure the President-elect that in the discharge of his duties as President of the Assembly at its sixty-third session he will be able to count on the dedicated support of the States members of the Asian Group, and we wish him every success in his new mission.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation and gratitude to you, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for your tireless efforts and commitment during the sixty-second session. Your extensive skill, leadership and dedication have been essential for the achievement of the successful outcome of the session during this most crucial period for the Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Ms. Toutkhalian (Armenia): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I would like to extend sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua on his election as President of the General Assembly for its sixty-third session. Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann served as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua for more than a decade, and he will bring his extensive political experience to the leadership of the General Assembly. It will be his task to manage a

number of important ongoing reforms that are vital to the future of the Organization and the international community. We are confident that he will continue the noteworthy work of Mr. Kerim, who has initiated a number of significant projects and discussions.

Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann's brilliant education and profound knowledge of worldly affairs are augmented by spiritual depth, tolerance and compassion, all of which are in great demand in the contemporary world. On behalf of the Eastern European Group, I would like to assure Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann that the Group stands ready to support his initiatives and to assist him in all his undertakings for the future strengthening of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bahamas, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Ms. Bethel (Bahamas): I speak on behalf of the States members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States: States of the region from which the President-elect of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session hails. Approximately two and a half months ago, on 14 March 2008, our Group unanimously endorsed the candidacy of Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann to preside over the Assembly at its upcoming session, beginning in September. We congratulate him and our sister country Nicaragua on his election by acclamation today.

Father Miguel d'Escoto's formal education in journalism has served as a background for the wide variety of activities and undertakings in which he has been engaged over the years, including working in the poorer communities of Santiago, Chile, in the 1960s, establishing the Orbis Books publishing house in the 1970s, and serving as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990. He is no stranger to the United Nations or to other international and regional organizations and forums.

Equally important and impressive is the extensive nature of Father Miguel's travels. In addition to his travels throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, he has also visited the majority of countries in Africa and Europe, and numerous countries in Asia as well. The first-hand knowledge and understanding of so many Member States, his constituents, provided by his travels should serve him well in the role that he will play as President of the General Assembly.

The issues to be addressed at the next session are myriad and challenging: climate change, development, poverty and energy, to name a few. But we are confident that Father d'Escoto will lead us well in these undertakings.

Not surprisingly, Father Miguel has received many awards and decorations attesting to his dedication, hard work and many contributions to the betterment of humankind. The States members of our Group applaud his many accomplishments. Once again, we sincerely congratulate him, a son of the region, on his election to the post of President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session, and we assure him of our full support and cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): In my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the Republic of Nicaragua on his election as President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session. Mr. d'Escoto's election is recognition of Nicaragua's important contribution to the United Nations over the years and since its inception.

Mr. d'Escoto will assume the presidency of the Assembly at a time when the United Nations faces many challenges. We are confident that the General Assembly will benefit from Mr. d'Escoto's experience as a politician and as a diplomat as he works to unite Member States on issues of concern to us all. I would like to assure Mr. d'Escoto that he can rely on the full support of the Group of Western European and other States as he carries out his responsibilities towards that end.

On a personal note, as Permanent Representative of Spain — and I could add as an old friend — let me add that I am particularly glad to see such a distinguished representative of Nicaragua and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States assuming the important functions of the presidency of the General Assembly.

Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to commend your leadership of the General Assembly during the current session. Your leadership has been fundamental in securing the significant

achievements that have already marked the General Assembly's sixty-second session, especially regarding the continuation of the reform process under way at the United Nations, and in dealing with a host of new and challenging issues facing the international community today.

We look forward to working with you in the remaining three months of your term of office to help complete the items still pending on the General Assembly's agenda and to ensure a smooth transition until the new presidency begins next September under the leadership of President-elect d'Escoto.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba, who will speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement in warmly congratulating His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann for his well-deserved election as President of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session. For the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries it is particularly gratifying to see the election of a worthy representative of the brotherly Republic of Nicaragua, a prestigious and active member of our movement. We are fully convinced that Mr. d'Escoto will brilliantly carry out the responsibility that we have bestowed upon him today. His outstanding statement this morning is proof of his vision, the values of which we share, and his firm commitment to move towards the achievement of the noble purposes and principles of our Organization.

I would like to take this opportunity also to thank His Excellency Srgjan Kerim for his excellent work as President of the current session.

There are many complex challenges that the next President of the General Assembly and the officers of the Main Committees will have to face. It is more urgent than ever today to continue to make progress towards the goal of revitalizing and strengthening the General Assembly. The Non-Aligned Movement believes that the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly is a decisive component of the overall reform of the United Nations. The States members of the movement are ready to work with the new President of the Assembly in continuing to strengthen the General Assembly's role as the principal deliberative, normative and representative organ of the United Nations.

I would like to conclude by reiterating on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement our warmest congratulations to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann and wishing him every success in his work. He can rest assured that he will always be able to count on the full cooperation and support of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 4.

Drawing of lots for the seating protocol for the sixty-third regular session

The President: As announced in the *Journal*, we will now proceed to the drawing of lots to determine which Member State will occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall at the sixty-third session. In accordance with established practice, the Secretary-General usually draws the name of one Member State from a box containing the names of the States members of the General Assembly. The delegation whose name has been drawn will occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall, and the other countries will follow in English alphabetical order. The same order will be observed in the Main Committees.

In the absence of the Secretary-General, I now invite the Deputy Secretary-General to proceed with the drawing of lots.

Having been drawn by lot by the Deputy Secretary-General, Barbados was chosen to occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall at the sixty-third session.

The President: I wish to inform members that, immediately after the adjournment of this meeting, consecutive meetings of the First Committee, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), and the Second, Third, Fifth and Sixth Committees will be held in this Hall to elect the members of their respective Bureaux.

Thereafter, the General Assembly will hold its 100th plenary meeting to elect the 21 Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly for the sixty-third session.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.